

# The Clipper Visits...Stanley Mercer

Duxbury Clipper

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## By MARTHA HIMES

Some men have trouble convincing their sons into following their footsteps, but not Stanley Mercer. His long career in jewelry sales inspired two of his sons to enter the jewelry business themselves.

Mercer, 80 in July and now retired, worked in the jewelry business for 44 years. He began in 1946, after his discharge from the Army, where he served in the South Pacific and Okinawa for three years. Even in the Army, his work involved watch repair—he was a member of the ordinance department, which repaired the officers' timepieces, as well as the infantry's sniper scopes.

Upon returning home to Massachusetts, he took a position with a jeweler in Brookline, where he learned the jewelry trade. One of the first things he learned was that he didn't want to sit at a jeweler's bench all day. Seeking a little more variety, he became a traveling salesman, working for wholesale jewelers.

For the next 42 years, Mercer traveled an average of 50,000 miles a year, covering New England and New York state. He was on the road five days a week, Monday through Friday. He sold ladies' diamond semi-mounts, which are mountings for diamond rings where the smaller, surrounding stones, often sapphires or diamonds, are already set in. The customer purchases or supplies the larger, center stone separately.

Mercer loved the traveling life. "I always thought that I would never like to get on the train to go to Boston and an office, and come home. When you're traveling, you're driving to a different account every day, and you're meeting different people every day, and it's very exciting. It gives you a much broader look on life."

Mercer did all this traveling from his home base in Duxbury, where he moved in 1946. Although he grew up in Brookline, he was familiar with Duxbury from having spent every summer here since 1929, when he was seven years old.

"I always liked Duxbury. When we came summers, it was always a pleasant move for us as youngsters coming down and being away from the city. I always thought it would be nice place to live," Mercer said.

Duxbury has changed quite a bit since Mercer's youth. He estimates the population back when he first began coming here at about 1600 souls, and remembers the graduating class in 1941 having 11 students in it.

"Powder Point and Standish Shore were all summer homes," he said. "It was strictly a summer town. It didn't become a bedroom town for business people until a long time after the war. And then people would buy these homes and winterize them."

He also remembers the 4<sup>th</sup> of July bonfire. The bonfire, a towering structure of barrels and railroad ties stacked about 100 feet high, used to be lit at

Train Field, behind the Percy Walker Pool. There was also a fair on the grounds.

"They had a big parade, and a few of the town characters were in the parade, like Ray Taylor. He'd have on an overcoat and smoke a big cigar. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, it was about 92 degrees," Mercer chuckled. "I don't know how he managed. The kids always used to yell to him, 'Hi Ray!' He was one of the big attractions."

Mercer and his wife, Mary, bought land on Crescent Street in 1963, where they built a house and raised 4 children, three sons: Stephen, Mark and Thomas, and a daughter, Grace.

Two of his sons followed their father into the jewelry business. Mercer's eldest son, Stephen, now works in the jewelry manufacturing business, marketing diamond semi-

mounts much like his father did. "He travels quite a bit to see his customers, too," Mercer said.

Mercer's son Mark, after acquiring a degree in business, decided to attend gemological school in Santa Monica, becoming a graduate gemologist. Unlike his father, Mark enjoys the benchwork. "He was on the road for a couple of years, traveling, but he didn't like it. He just didn't like that type of life," Mercer said.

About two years ago, Mark stopped traveling, and opened Duxbury Jewelers on Standish Street. There, he sells and repairs jewelry, and can create

custom designs for clients. He is a goldsmith and can do repairs on site, rather than sending them out.

"Mark has got good hands," his father said proudly. "He's very clever that way."

Besides his interest in jewelry, Mercer also shared his interest in clocks with his sons. "I had a collection of clocks. I always bought clocks when I was on the road," he said. Some of Mercer's favorite clocks are grandfather and grandmother clocks, banjo clocks, French regulators, and Chelsea ship's bell striking clocks.

"On a ship, the sailors would have to stand watch. Each watch was four hours. Ship's bell clocks would ring, so the sailor would know the time. The ship's bell rings twice, *ding-ding*, for one hour of his watch. The first hour it would chime, *ding-ding*. And on the second hour, it would ring *ding-ding, ding-ding*. The sailor's watch would be over when he heard four *ding-dings*."

Mark now carries a line of Chelsea clocks in his store, and also carries reproduction Willard banjo clocks. By the end of the year he hopes to have available a banjo clock painted with a Duxbury scene of the King Caesar house. Additionally, he has taken so many clocks in for repair that the store's back rooms resemble a clock manufactory. There seem to be clocks and clock parts on every table surface.

Although Mercer formally retired from the jewelry business in 1990, his sales skills aren't sitting idle: he helps out in his son's store when needed. So now, father and son get to work together, in what seems to have become the family business.

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